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LEARNING AND TEACHING IN THE OPEN AIR IN PALESTINE

IN the current volume of this REVIEW, p. 111 ff., Professor Krauss, in his note on the word *יניונית*, incidentally refers to the question whether the rabbis of Talmudic times studied and taught in the open air. For his evidence, he quotes his full article in Lewy's *Festschrift* on the vineyard in Jamnia, and his *Archaeologie*, III, 205. As neither this work, nor the article mentioned dealt with the general question, I may be permitted to refer again to the very instructive information in Talmudic sources on studying in the open air, and to discuss here a few pertinent statements which may assist students of Palestinian archaeology in solving the interesting problem concerning the vineyard in Jamnia.

R. Johanan b. Zakkai taught in Jerusalem on the Temple mount in the shade of the walls of the Temple.¹ One of his former fellow-students in Hillel's school, Jonathan b. 'Uzziel, must also have studied in the open air; for it is reported (Sukkah 28 a) that, when he was learning Torah, every bird flying over him was burnt by the heavenly fire surrounding him.² On the steps of the Temple mount, ben-Zoma was once so greatly absorbed in mystical thoughts that he did not greet R. Joshua b. Ḥananiah.³ In the gate of R. Joshua's house, four of his disciples sat and discussed some questions (Tos. Berakot IV, 18); and R. Tarfon and his disciples sat in the shade of a dove-cot in Jamnia discussing a biblical subject.⁴ R. Jose b. Ḥalafta sat

¹ Pesahim 26 a; p. 'Abodah zarah III, 43 b, l. 66.

² See Bacher, *Agada der Tannaiten*, I, 124, 1.

³ Baraita in Ḥagigah 15 a; Tos. II, 5; p. II, 77 a, b; Genes. rab. 2. 4.

⁴ Tos. Berakot IV, 16; Mekhilta on Exod. 14. 22, p. 31 b; Midr. Psalms LXXVI, § 2.

in the market (of Sepphoris), and expounded to a matrona and her husband a detail referring to the messianic times.⁵ R. Eleazar b. Pedath studied in the lower market of Sepphoris; while his cloak lay in the upper market ('Erubin 54 b); as there were trees planted in that market,⁶ he may have sat under one of them. R. Judah b. R. Jannai was so greatly absorbed in his study that he did not notice that his cloak had slipped (from his shoulders); when his disciples drew his attention to it, he pointed to a serpent guarding his cloak (p. Berakot V, 9 a, l. 47). R. Jannai studied in the gate of Sepphoris.⁷ R. Simeon b. Lakish studied outside the gate of Tiberias.⁸

Naturally, the scholars studied in the open air only during the warm season, and, as the sun often shone hot, sat in the shade of buildings or more probably of trees. There were in Palestine many kinds of shady trees,⁹ some of which were fully

⁵ Midrash Tannaim, ed. Hoffmann, p. 262.

⁶ Tos. Kil'aim I, 4; p. I, 27 a, l. 38.

⁷ Genes. rab. 10. 7; Num. rab. 18. 22; Kohel. rab. 9, 5; Bacher, *Paläst. Amoräer*, I, 37, 3.

⁸ Genes. rab. 34. 15; Kohel. rab. 3. 9; p. Berakot V, 9 a, l. 45; Bacher, *Paläst. Amoräer*, I, 346, 5. In Midrash ha-Gadol. on Deut. 18. 14 R. Jannai and R. Joḥanan sat in the gate of Tiberias, when two astrologers also sat there. In the first passage אֵילָנִים is explained to mean a grove, which would be a more suitable place for study than the gate of a city. See also Makkot 19 b according to Rashi's version: R. Ḥanina and R. Hoshaiah were sitting at the entrance of Jerusalem, and raised a halakic question; see also Rabbinowicz.

⁹ The Bible incidentally refers to the apple-tree in Cant. 2. 3; 8. 5; the oak and poplar in Hosea 4. 13; the terebinth, under which a prophet sat, in 1 Kings 13. 14; Ezek. 6. 13; the olive-tree in Hosea 14. 7; Jer. 11. 16; Psalms 52. 10; 92. 11; the cedar-tree in Ezek. 17. 23; 31. 3; the fir-tree (ברוש) in Hosea 14. 9. No reference is found to the shade of the fig-tree and of the vine; but Midr. Cant. 2. 13 points to the breadth of the foliage of the fig-tree, and in Pesikt. rab. XLI, 172 b, R. Ḥanina b. Papa says that its branches spread in all directions. A vine was sometimes trained over a trellis (Krauss, II, 229) and gave very pleasant shade. As to the shade of the apple-tree, there are contradictory statements. R. Jose b. Zimra in Cant. r. 2. 3, Pesikt. 103 a, says that in the heat all flee from the apple-tree, for it has no shade; on the other hand in a passage of the Midr. Jelamdenu in

covered with leaves already in Adar (March–April).¹⁰ Once when R. Johanan b. Zakkai and his favourite disciple Eleazar b. 'Arach were on the way, and the latter offered to expound to the master a detail of mystical philosophy, R. Johanan dismounted from his ass and, with his companion, sat down on a stone under an olive-tree, and soon all the trees joined in praises for R. Eleazar's exposition.¹¹ During the religious persecutions, R. Akiba once taught and expounded the law at his table under an olive-tree.¹² R. Jonathan b. Eleazar (of Sepphoris) was once, in the summer, sitting under a fig-tree; when he noticed the flow of juice from the ripe figs, he called his disciples and showed them the wonderful blessing.¹³ In these instances individual teachers and exceptional circumstances prove nothing for the studying or teaching of the rabbis under trees. But different is the case of R. Hyrkanos, probably the son of R. Eliezer,¹⁴ who had in Kefar-'etam the act of חליצה performed under a terebinth;¹⁵

Jellinek's בית המדרש VI, 82, § 27, it is the last refuge in a garden where no other shady tree is planted. In Pesahim 111 a R. Isaac refers to the danger of sleeping under a solitary palm-tree, and in Midr. Psalms 92. 10 R. Isaac b. Adda points out that the shade of the palm-tree is far away from the tree, meaning the shade of the crown. As to the shade of the juniper under which Elijah sat in 1 Kings 19. 4; Midr. Psalms 120. 4, and the *kikayon* in Jonah 4. 10, see the commentators.

¹⁰ In p. Rosh ha-Shanah II, 58 a, l. 22, it is stated that in the month of Adar it is so warm that an ox would like to strip his hide in the shade of a fig-tree. In the parallel in b. Sanhedrin 18 b: 'In Adar, in the morning an ox would die from cold, at noon he would lie down in the shade of a fig-tree and strip his hide.' The leaves withered after a hundred days, Tos. Shebiit IV, 20.

¹¹ Hagigah 14 b; Tos. II, 1; p. II, 77 a, l. 59.

¹² כלה in Coronel's קונטרסים, p. 19 a; Derek ereš XI, 5, 6; Epstein, מקדמוניות היהודים, p. 115.

¹³ Tanḥuma תצוה 13, Buber 10. Buber refers to a parallel in והזהיר p. 100 b, which adds: 'To be in the shade and protected from the sun.' In p. Pesahim VII, 20 b, l. 1, R. Iddi reports a similar incident without mentioning any name. In Shabbat I, 56 b R. Naḥman b. Isaac sat under a palm-tree and studied.

¹⁴ Shabbat 147 a; Sanhedrin 68 a; Menahot 35 a; Sotah III, 19 a, l. 6.

¹⁵ Jebamot XII, 6; the Cambridge Mishnah reads כפר עכו, pal. כפר איכס.

for this shows that he taught and judged in the open air under a tree.¹⁶ R. Ḥiyya b. Abba and his colleagues, according to some R. Jose b. Ḥalafta and his colleagues, according to others R. Akiba and his colleagues, were sitting under a fig-tree and studying; when they saw that the owner of the tree came early every morning and picked figs, they thought that he suspected them of eating his figs, and they moved to another place.¹⁷ The most characteristic passage, however, is Cant. rab. 4. 4, § 6, where R. Aḥa, in interpreting Cant. 4. 3, says: כַּפְלָה הַרְמוֹן רִקְתָּ, וְאִין צְרִיךְ לוֹמַר מִבְּעַד לְצַמְתְּךָ עַל הָרִיקוֹן שֶׁבִּסְנֵה־רֵרִין רְצוֹף תּוֹרָה כְּרֵמוֹן הוּא, ואִין צְרִיךְ לוֹמַר מִבְּעַד לְצַמְתְּךָ עַל הָרִיקוֹן שֶׁבִּסְנֵה־רֵרִין רְצוֹף תּוֹרָה כְּרֵמוֹן הוּא, 'the weakest member of the Synhedrion is as full of learning as the pomegranate (is full with seeds); but even more so those sitting under the olive-tree, and under the vine, and under the fig-tree, and studying Torah'.¹⁸ About the middle of the fourth century, it must accordingly have been the general custom of the scholars to study under trees, and, as R. Ḥiyya's case shows, not merely of individual teachers, but of whole schools. Though late, yet historically very instructive, is the agadic statement in Seder Eliahu IX (Friedmann, p. 50) that Deborah went and sat under a palm-tree and taught Torah publicly. Though based on Judges 4. 5, it would not have been said that she taught in public under a palm-tree, if the custom had not still been general in the times of the author. This is further evident from the statement in the same passage, לֹא הָיוּ תַלְמִידֵי חֲכָמִים בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל אֶלָּא כַּחֲצֵי דְקַל בְּלִבְר, 'that in Deborah's time there were not more scholars than about half a palm-tree'. For this very strange measure presupposes that the scholars of the time, as a rule many, were studying under trees;¹⁹

¹⁶ Cf. Judges 4. 5; 1 Sam. 14. 2; 22. 6.

¹⁷ p. Berakot II, 5 c, l. 9; Genes. rab. LXII, 2; Cant. rab. 6 2, 2.

¹⁸ According to the climax, the men studying under the trees were the excellent members of the Synhedrion. R. Samuel Jafé refers the first group to the scholars attending the meetings of the Synhedrion without being yet members (Sanhedrin IV, 4), and the second group to the members.

¹⁹ Friedmann in his note refers to Megillah 14 a where MSS. in Rabinowicz read: מִה תִּמְדַּר זֶה צֶלֶו מוֹעֵט אֶף תַּלְמִידֵי חֲכָמִים שְׁבָאוֹתוֹ הָרֹדֶר

the palm-tree, which offered no shade of any extent, was only mentioned because the verse spoke of such a tree.²⁰

As to the great school in Jamnia, the frequent **כרם שניבנה**, the vineyard in Jamnia, naturally suggests that the school met during the warm and dry season in an orchard next to a building required for the rainy months. In addition, a Baraita in Baba meši'a 59 b, which seems to have escaped the attention of scholars dealing with the school buildings, gives, in spite of the miracles reported, noteworthy information. In the heated discussion of the scholars of the *bet-din* in Jamnia, which led up to the exclusion of R. Eliezer b. Hyrkanos from the school, this scholar said to the assembly: 'If the decision is according to my view, this carob-tree shall prove it'; and the carob-tree was uprooted (and carried off) a hundred yards. When the rabbis refused to accept the proof derived from the carob-tree, R. Eliezer said: 'If the decision is according to my view, the canal shall prove it', and the canal flowed backwards. When the rabbis refused to accept the proof derived from the canal, R. Eliezer said: 'The walls of the school shall prove it'; and the walls of the school inclined to fall. When R. Joshua rebuked them, they did not collapse, nor stand erect; and they are still standing in the same position. The order in which R. Eliezer calls on his witnesses shows that the discussion took place in the open air, in a garden or a field with a carob-tree and a water-canal, and that close by stood a school-house with strongly built walls.²¹ If

מועטין היי, as the shade of the palm-tree is little so the number of scholars in Deborah's time were few.

²⁰ Also R. Judah b. Ilai's statement in Cant. rab. 6. 9, § 2 (cf. Friedmann's *Pesikt. rab.* p. 198 a), is to be considered as evidence. He refers the sixty queens in Cant. 6. 9 to the sixty **חברות**, companies of righteous men who sit in the garden of Eden under the tree of life and study the Torah; and the eighty concubines are eighty companies of average men who study the Torah outside the tree of life; and the girls without number refer to students innumerable.

²¹ According to the parallel account in p. Mo'ed Kaṭan III, 81 d, l. 9, the pillars of the house of meeting (= the school) were on that occasion shaken but a little earlier in the report the carob-tree belonged to R. Eliezer's

further details were known, 'the vineyard in Jamnia' would be proved as an extensive orchard under the shady trees of which the rabbis sat in the summer and discussed all questions.

Comparing with this the passage from the Midrash Jelamdenu discussed by Professor Krauss, כשם שחבירים היושבת בננים חברים, יושבין גנוניות גנוניות ועוסקים בתורה אני יורד אצלם ואני מקשיב לקולם ושומע, we would be inclined to find here a reference to scholars sitting in gardens and studying. But the mere fact that the plain word בננים of the text in Cant. 8. 13 was not retained without any change or interpretation shows that גנוניות does not mean gardens. Nor can it be said without strain in Hebrew that scholars sit like small gardens; in the plain prose of an agadah an adverbial accusative denoting place must not be assumed. Kohut seems to be right in suggesting from the context and from the parallel in Cant. rab. 8. 13, 2 as the meaning of גנוניות 'company', 'assembly'; but his derivation of the word from *κοινωνία* seems unlikely. What is wanted here is a synonym of כת or חבורה, as used in the statement of R. Tanḥum b. R. Ḥiyya of Kefar-'Akko in Berakot 63 b, עשו כתות כתות ועסקו בתורה לפי שאין התורה נקנית אלא בחבורה, 'form groups and study Torah, for this can only be acquired in company'. גנונית which was used only on account of גנים in the verse, seems to be identical with or similar to גנון used as interpretation of גן in Cant. rab. 1. 3, 2 ליגינונו (Lev. r. 9. 8, Pesikt. r. V, 18 a), 5. 1, 1 באתי לגני לגנוני (Pesikt. 1 a), meaning a cover, a shade overhead, just as סִיָּקָה and צֶל, and as חֶפֶה in Isaiah 4. 5; and גנונית probably meant the company sitting under the חֶפֶה and waiting, as the בני חֶפֶה in Tos. Berakot II, 10; Tos. Shabbat XVII, 4; p. Hagigah II, 77 a, l. 59; b. Sukkah 25 b, 26 a; p. II, 53 a, l. 21, 'for God as the bridegroom to come to the bower'. As חֶפֶה was even in Talmudic times used still for a shade,²² foliage under which the scholars were sitting could be

private house. The details are in favour of the Baraita in the Babylonian Talmud.

²² R. Ḥiyya b. Abba in Lev. rab. 25. 2, says: עתיד הקב"ה לעשות צל וחופות לבעלי המצות אצל בני תורה בן ערן, God will make for charitable men in the garden of Eden a shade and bowers next to the scholars. He took

called גְּנוּזָה.²³ If this interpretation is right, the passage is an additional proof for the studying of scholars in groups in the shade of trees.

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the idea from his master R. Johanan who said, in *Baba bathra* 75a, that God will once make seven bowers for every righteous man, as He had, according to R. Hama b. Hāninah, made for Adam ten bowers in the garden of Eden (also in *Lev. rab.* 20. 2; *Pesikt. rab.* XXXI, 145a); see *Monatsschrift f. G. u. W. d. J.*, XLIX (1905), 18 ff.

²³ Compare *Lev. rab.* 24. 7 where *Deut.* 23. 15 בִּי יי אֱלֹהֶיךָ מִתְחַלֵּךְ בְּקֶרֶב is explained by הָגֵן, to protect, shade overhead, as by the foliage of a tree, לְהִגֵּן עֲלֶיךָ לְהִיּוֹת צֶלַעַל רִאשׁוֹ. In *Mekhilthā* on *Exod.* 13. 21, p. 25 a, it is explained that God rewarded Abraham's words to the angels in *Gen.* 18. 4 to lean under the tree, by spreading over his descendants seven clouds; in both cases it was shade overhead. See also 4 *Ezra* 1. 20; *Midr. Threni* r. 1, 17; *Psalms* 42. 4.